

Gregory Tailings (Ruins)
Jct. Colorado Highways 269 and 119
Black Hawk
Gilpin County
Colorado

HAER No. CO-39

HAER
COLO,
24-BHAWK,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS.

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Gregory Tailings (Ruins)

HAER No. CO-39

Location: Located at the junction of Colorado Highways 269 and 119 in Black Hawk, Gilpin County, Colorado

Quad: Black Hawk
Range 72 West
Township 3 South
Section 7

Date of Construction: c. 1863 to c. 1903

Present Owner: Mr. & Mrs. Norman Blake
P. O. Box 158
Black Hawk, Colorado 80422
Telephone: (303) 674-2262

Present Use: None. The owners may reprocess the tailings in the future, if deemed financially viable, or to mitigate the potential failure of the tailings.

Significance: The Gregory Tailings are remnants of the first gold lode vein discovered in Colorado. The wood cribbing retaining the tailings is laminated in some places, a previously-unused cribbing construction unique at the time to the Gregory Tailings.

Edited, Retyped
and Transmitted by: Jean P. Yearby, HAER, 1988

I. HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Significance

The Gregory Tailings are remnants of the first gold lode vein discovered in Colorado.. The lode, officially recorded on May 6, 1859, is located near the junction of Bobtail and Gregory Gulches in Gilpin County, Colorado. Gold accounted for 85% of the mineral wealth and, by 1875, some \$8.75 million of ore had been generated, making the lode the most profitable of all in Gilpin County. The lode was subsequently divided, and several mines operated unsuccessfully upon the lode until the late 1800s. Ores were processed in the Black Hawk Mill (circa 1863), utilizing both amalgamation and concentration processes. In addition to gold, minor amounts of silver were realized.

The Black Hawk Mill produced approximately 25,000 tons of waste, now known as the Gregory Tailings. Small embankments were built and a slurry of water and mill tailings were then pumped from the mill into these ponds. The tailings consist of fine grained materials and range in thickness up to 25 feet, averaging 15 feet across the 2-1/2 acres site. In the 1880s, a wooden crib wall was constructed along the west bank of adjacent Clear Creek to accommodate greater volumes of tailings slurry. Some of the cribbing was comprised of laminated wood sections, a unique feature at that time. Mining declined after the turn of the century and the mill closed, making the tailings and crib wall now relics of a past prosperity.

Original and Subsequent Owners

The Gregory Lode was officially discovered on May 6, 1859 by John H. Gregory. Accompanying Gregory were William Ziegler, Dr. Joseph Casto, James D. Wood, H. P. A. Smith, C. H. Butler, James Hunter, the Defree brothers, Messrs. Wilkerson and Archibald, and a Captain Bates. Many of these gentlemen would discover claims of their own and would be instrumental in the organization of early mining laws and the formation of a local mining district in 1859.

Numerous claims were made upon the lode and these claims were frequently bought and sold, resulting in a confusing succession of ownerships. Among the more notable titleholders were the Narragansett Company (later known as the O'Neill property), the New York and Colorado Company, and the Briggs-Gregory Company (a merger of the neighboring Briggs and Black Hawk workings). During the 1860s, the Black Hawk mine excavated the richest portion of the Gregory Lode and was the site of the Black Hawk Mill, which subsequently produced the Gregory Tailings.

In the late 1800s, the Briggs brothers leased the consolidated Gregory properties and merged with the nearby Bobtail Mine. The combined lodes were worked by way of an inclined tunnel (completed May 28, 1886), which connected the workings with the Black Hawk production mill. The Fifty Gold Mines Company eventually controlled these properties, and the Black Hawk Mill became known as the Fifty Mill and operated into the first decade of the twentieth century, whereupon mining of the Gregory lode ceased. The mine is presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Norman Blake of Black Hawk, Colorado.

Structural Details

Access to the lode was provided by the Gregory Incline, a timber-braced inclined passage through the overburden extending some 1,700 feet. This tunnel has collapsed and is now flooded. The tailings crib wall has decayed, resulting in diminished structural integrity. Evidence of this appears as several collapsed sections along Clear Creek. The 16-foot-high wooden crib wall forms interlocking boxes (cribs), within which granular fill is placed to facilitate drainage and to provide lateral support for the generated tailings. Failure of the crib would contaminate the creek with acidic waters containing heavy metals, resulting in contamination of aquatic habitats and municipal water supplies downstream.

At present, the Gregory Tailings are in imminent danger of collapse, with approximately one-half of the original crib wall still standing. The site is bordered by North Clear Creek to the northeast, by a storage yard to the southeast, and by Gregory Hill to the west.

II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Project Status

The Gregory Tailings is an operable unit of the Clear Creek, Central City, National Priority List site, governed by the Environmental Protection Agency under authority of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act. Plans to mitigate the threat of the tailings collapse are being formulated. This documentation was prepared by Ecology and Environment, Inc., under the direction of the Environmental Protection Agency, on February 16, 1987.

References

Roy F. Weston, Inc. Gregory Tailings, draft historical documentation, for E.P.A. Emergency Response Branch, January 1987.

Camp Dresser & McKee, Inc., Preliminary Screening Analysis, Gregory Incline and Tailings, Expedited Response Action, Clear Creek/Central City, April 11, 1986 (Document No. 202-ER1-RT-CJHM-1).

Camp Dresser & McKee, Inc., Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis of Alternatives, Gregory Incline and Tailings, Expedited Response Action, Clear Creek/Central City, June 13, 1986 (Document No. 202-ER1-RT-CVMC-1).

Environmental Protection Agency - Region VIII, Superfund Program Factsheet, Gregory Tailings, Black Hawk, Colorado, Clear Creek/Central City Superfund Site, July 1986.

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation on the Gregory Lode.

Mrs. Norman Blake, January 1987.

Frank Fossett. Colorado: A Historical, Descriptive and Statistical Work on the Rocky Mountain Gold and Silver Mining Region. Denver: Daily Tribune Steam Printing Press.

Ovando Hollister. The Mines of Colorado. Springfield: Samuel Bowles & Company, 1867.

Donald Kemp. Colorado's Little Kingdom. Denver: Sage Books, 1949.

USGS. Economic Geology of Gilpin and Adjacent Parts of Clear Creek and Boulder Counties, Colorado. Professional paper #94 by Bastil and Hill. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917.

Colorado State Historic Preservation Office Reference Files.